

**RESEARCH PAPER****The U.S.-India Nuclear Deal: Strategic Shifts and Security Implications in South Asia****¹Erum Hanif and ²Dr. Muhammad Muzaffar***

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***Corresponding Author:** muzaffarrrps@gcwus.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

The ink-accord between U.S. and India around Civil Nuclear domain marked a transformative moment in global nuclear diplomacy and geopolitics of South Asia. This research paper examines the multifaceted dimensions of the deal, calibrating how it redefined relations, challenged traditional non-proliferation norms, and escalated strategic stature of India in the region. Against the global background of evolving concept of national security amid shifting global power dynamics, the paper outlines India's effort to lead in the region and how this makes Pakistan uneasy. Using a qualitative method, the study reviews official statements, analyzes policies, draws from academic sources and uses the media to study the different results of the deal. According to the findings, the arrangement enabled India to work more closely with the nuclear world, but also upset the regional balance among nations. As a result, Pakistan's level of threat increased, requiring it to restyle its defense system and strengthen its ties with China. The analysis finds that the deal has introduced unequal situations and weaker support for the global ban on nuclear weapons. It urges the world to restart inclusive non-proliferation talks, strengthen regional steps to build confidence and provide access to civilian nuclear technology to all countries on an equal basis with strong safeguards.

KEYWORDS U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Deal, 123 Agreement, Strategic partnership, South Asia security, Regional hegemony, Non-proliferation, India-Pakistan relations, China's regional role, Nuclear diplomacy, Power asymmetry

Introduction

There is no doubt, contemporary era of technological advancement has made the international political system complex that have evolved the concept of security. As each state's unique priorities and aspirations shaped multi-dimensional approaches. When it comes to define the term security, there is no universally accepted definition, as national interests and geopolitical contexts differ across the globe in general, and in South Asia region in specific. In such existing context, some states respect territorial sovereignty and external defense, others prioritize on economic resilience, and safeguarding their ideological bases, or global influence. For example, the security policy of United States often hinges upon counter-terrorism and global leadership, China concentrates on economic ascendancy and resisting external dominance, and India increasingly desires to proclaim itself as a regional hegemon. Such prevailing context of security agendas defines how states tailor their security strategies to follow distinct roles in the global political arena. Against this backdrop, the US-India nuclear deal emerges as a bilateral agreement that bolsters India's regional standing and raises critical questions about power asymmetry and stability in South Asia (Paul, 2006).

The security priorities and elements of a nation serve as the foundation for its foreign and security policies, which in turn dictate its behavior and interactions with other countries globally, influencing its relationships, alliances, and actions on the world stage. As the second-most populous country and boasting significant military capabilities, India aspires to elevate its position to a major world power, seeking to expand its influence and play a more prominent role in global affairs. India's ambition to be acknowledged as a global power has led to a strengthening strategic alliance with the US, enabling it to access cutting-edge defense technologies – including nuclear and missile systems, advanced weaponry, fighter jets, naval vessels, submarines, radars, and surveillance tools – significantly enhancing its military capabilities. India boasts a substantial military superiority in the region, with a nearly three-fold advantage in terms of personnel and resources compared to Pakistan. Pakistan perceives India's procurement of sophisticated nuclear and military technologies through its strategic partnership with the US as a significant threat to its national security, escalating tensions between the two neighboring countries (Bukhari, 2015).

The research paper under review is discussing the nuclear deal between India and the United States that has enabled India to acquire maximum level of nuclear facilities importation from the United States. Simultaneously, it is further exposing how the inclination of regional power balance in favor of India and has influenced the nuclear policy decisions in the region. As it has been observed that increasing cooperation of United states in the south Asian region has enabled India to acquire more missile material for energy production and the advancement of nuclear arsenals of India which has many countries in the region specially Pakistan to align with the regional super power to contain the influence of Indian hegemony (Muzaffar, et. al., 2018). Therefore, the research paper has addressed the queries related to armed race in the region specifically how Indo-US deals excluded Pakistan and how such exclusion has made Pakistan looking for other avenues and windows of opportunities to counterbalance in the region. As such geopolitical context created opportunities for strengthening Pak-China ties and China emerged as the sole supporter of Pakistan in matters related to enhancement of Pakistan's nuclear capacity (Ain, et. al., 2024).

Literature Review

The concentration of US investing in India, specifically after 9/11 incidents, has been widely examined in international relations scholarship for its far-reaching implications on regional power dynamics, particularly in South Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific. In a similar manner, the ink-accords of US and India are the further areas of the concern of several political analysts and international watchdogs. This geopolitical gesture positioned India as a counterweight to China while implicitly legitimizing its nuclear status outside the NPT framework. The situation is perplexing as it is quite complicated to define whether the deal reinforced India's hegemonic aspirations in the region, expanded its strategic autonomy, or simply entrenched asymmetries in the global non-proliferation regime. On the other hand, China's growing assertiveness in response to the US-India partnership – reflected in regional alignments, military modernization, and Belt and Road initiatives – has emerged as a critical dimension in understanding the evolving balance of power in Asia.

With respect to it, the inevitable rise of conflicts among influential powers in the Indian Ocean as their interests in the region has been studies to comprehend whether it is threat. As after the 9/11, the United States of America emerged to be one of the most prominent stakeholders, who has turn over a new leaf of policies and actions to be taken in the region. According to Tahir & Ijaz, the US considers the region as its backyard and

have sought to utilize all the aspects to gain hegemony over the region. For this reason, it has turn towards India to gain control of the region by signing Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, a significant part of the India-US strategic partnership. Moreover, the military and naval exercises in the region, especially the Oceanic region, has taken roots which has the potential to enhance the complexities of the geopolitical domains (Tahir & Ejaz, 2020).

In similar vein, to analyze all the aspects related to the India and United States strategic partnership and its significant ramifications on Pakistan along with other states in the region is quite logical. During the survey of literature, it has become clear that the United States emerged to be the sole super power at the international realm in the aftermath of the cold war. Number of writers argued that the fundamental cause of the United States behind the establishment of friendly relations with both India and Pakistan was to fulfill its own strategic interests in the region by taking advantage of the regional players. The role of the United States apparent while exploring the geopolitical dynamics of the South Asian region. The US relationship with Pakistan turn a new leaf after the signing of 2006 civil nuclear deal between US and India, despite Pakistan's efforts to counter terrorism side by side with the United States. During the literature review the rationale behind Indo US strategic partnership [which include the China-Pakistan historic friendly relations] and the maintenance of its sole hegemony at the international level identified. The context of Iqbal explores the reasons behind the increasing distance between Pakistan and the United States including the operations of the United States within Pakistan against Osama Bin Laden, Raymond Davis case and many more which posed serious security ramifications for Pakistan (Iqbal, 2020).

In addition to it, the available literature that highlighted the nuclear weapon explosions of 1998 by India and Pakistan further helped understanding the rapid shift in the region specifically in the domain of gaining diplomatic muscles. It signifies the nuclear position, at the international level, of both states hold. This further increased the understanding about the proliferation of nuclear arsenals in the south Asian region and the concerns of international nonproliferation regimes. The deal between India and the United States has the potential to destabilize the region and give rise to the arms race. It can deteriorate the regional cooperation, and change the dynamics of alliance formed in the region. it suggests the need for maximizing the impacts of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to flow he principles of this treaty worldwide. Moreover, it further encourages the sanctions on the transportation of nuclear weapons to the non-nuclear states around the globe and gave a push for the peaceful use of nuclear technology (Muhammad, 2006).

Similarly, there are a number of analysts who discussed how Pakistan and China take US-India Nuclear deal as a threat to their mutual security apparatus. Such material helped to understand the response of Pakistan and China against this civil nuclear deal. This specific context sport to define the impacts of the civil nuclear deal on Pakistan and China and their response along with the fundamental rationale behind the Pakistan China strategic partnership (Hussain, 2017)

Notwithstanding the academic literature, this research paper draws upon books authored by political leaders and several official statements issued by key political stakeholders engaged in the negotiation of the U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement. Particular emphasis is placed on premier-level representatives, who held the position of Foreign Secretary and were the part deliberations and diplomatic exchanges surrounding the deal. With respect to it, the comments and accounts of Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale worth-mentioning. This dignitary exposed that China allegedly engaged Indian

Left-wing parties to obstruct the agreement, highlighting the geopolitical complexity surrounding the Indo-US Nuclear deal (Gokhale, 2021).

Material and Methods

This research paper considered a qualitative methodology to examine the influence of the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Deal on geopolitics of South Asia region, while also analyzing evolving patterns of diplomatic relationship of Pakistan – particularly in the post-U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and in the context of the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) 2017 and its Indo-Pacific framework. The qualitative approach allows a conceptual and analytical engagement with the subject, that addresses the queries such as “how,” “why,” and “with what implications” underpinning strategic realignments in the region. The policy statements, strategic documents, scholarly articles, and official speeches from key stakeholders are specifically considered. This methodological framework, as outlined by Creswell (2012), facilitates the integration of diverse qualitative tools to holistically address the research objectives and draw meaningful conclusions about the geopolitical shifts driven by the civil nuclear agreement.

Results and Discussion

The history of Indo-US relations has experienced numerous fluctuations since India's independence in 1947. Although recent developments have injected new energy into the relationship, initial enthusiasm shortly after India gained independence waned over time. As one of the first countries to gain independence post-World War II, India promoted and adopted the idea of non-alignment (non-alignment movement) in global politics. This policy was influenced by India's historical experiences, including its struggle for independence, sympathy for similar movements worldwide, opposition to racial discrimination, and a desire for global peace. Prime Minister Nehru's belief in non-alignment aimed to navigate the superpower rivalries of the time. Despite a promising start, there was little interest from the U.S. in Indo-US relations, as reflected in a 1947 CIA report deeming India one of the least important countries for Washington's interests (Super, 2015). However, the early 1960s saw a shift in U.S. interest, marking an era of strategic cooperation, particularly during the 1962 Sino-Indian War when PM Nehru sought and received support from U.S. President John F. Kennedy.

This collaboration was broken up by the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 and further deteriorated in 1971 when the U.S. supported Pakistan by sending the nuclear-powered USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal. This move prompted India to seek support from the Soviet Union, resulting in a shift towards the USSR. Additionally, the U.S.'s rapprochement with China in 1972 and subsequent sanctions against India following the 1974 Pokhran nuclear tests strained relations further (Vijayalakshmi, 2017). Following the Cold War, there was a renewed convergence due to the disintegration of the USSR and changes in the governments in both India and the US. However, India's 1998 Pokhran-II nuclear tests once again strained bilateral relations, prompting strong condemnation and economic sanctions from the U.S. This period also paved the way for the Talbott- Jaswant talks, which aimed to resolve misunderstandings and establish a framework for improved relations (Sharma, 2020).

The strategic cooperation between the United States and India and the US has empowered India's hegemonic aspirations in South Asia, posing significant threats to the sovereignty and security of smaller regional states, with Pakistan having been the most vulnerable to India's aggressive posturing. India's major foreign policy aims, as identified by Teresita C. Schaffer, include achieving regional security and maintaining

its dominance in South Asian security affairs. To further these goals, India perceives the United States as a potential supporter, with the notable exception of Pakistan, where bilateral differences persist (Schaffer, 2009). Through its strategic alliance with the US, India gains leverage to sway US influence in its favor, allowing it to maneuver US policy towards Pakistan to address multiple contentious issues between India and Pakistan. Fareed Zakaria's analysis highlights India's dependence on a stable Pakistan relationship for its immediate security. Given the fraught nature of their ties, the US plays a vital role as a mediator. By partnering with the US, India can leverage America's considerable sway over Pakistan, securing a formidable ally (Zakaria, 2011). As noted by Durrani, the US's backing of India exacerbates the power imbalance between India and Pakistan, enhancing India's dominant position in the region (Durrani, 2011). India has a history of leveraging US-Pakistan differences to its benefit, frequently casting itself as a victim of Pakistani terrorism. The aftermath of the Abbottabad Operation showcased this approach, as India capitalized on the situation to launch a scathing critique of Pakistan and advance its own agenda.

The civilian nuclear accord between the United States and India announced in 2005 also quoted as the 123 agreement marks a notable shift in the U.S. Policy direction for South Asia. Both countries are pursuing their interests from this deal. The objective of the U.S. behind this initiative was to offset China's growing presence in the region. As noted by Joseph Cirincione, top expert of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Project at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "The crux of this announcement is what it tells us about the US grand strategy, and that behind whatever else is going on here the US is preparing for a grand conflict with China and constructing an anti-China coalition, In that scenario, India is even more valuable as a nuclear power, rather than as a non-nuclear count" (Haider, 2015) clearly showing the interest of U.S. behind this deal with India. The agreement has widespread implications for India, the U.S. and the broader South Asian region, particularly Pakistan.

Rationale of Nuclear Proliferation Cooperation between USA and India

In the aftermath of the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Cold War concluded, marking the beginning of new chapters in global politics. The bipolar world system ended with the emergence of several newly independent nations. However, the rise of the United States as a unipolar superpower played a significant role in defining the new geopolitical and strategic landscape of the world (Imtiaz, et. al., 2023). The US had the leverage over other nations of the world due to the vacuum left post-Cold War. Thus, it gained the advantage of exercising influence over other nations, especially the newly independent states, without any external hindrances for a period of time. However, this gap has been narrowing with the rise of China as an emerging superpower and the world's second-largest economy. As a result, China now holds a dominant position in the region. China has historically adopted a policy of non-alignment, but in recent decades, it has begun to form regional and international alliances, including aligning with states that have relations with the United States (Muzaffar, et. al., 2017)

Global power dynamics began to shift based on the relationships each country maintains with the world's great powers. Within the regional and trans regional landscape of alliance buildup, the relationships started to gain momentum in the domains of security and economic assistance. South Asia emerged to be one of the most significant regions in the whole world having the potential to drag the international attention towards it due to the regional conflicts and hostility among the states. Therefore, the global developments taking place internationally have significantly

affected the whole region of South Asia. Political evolution took a stronghold in South Asia, attracting international major powers to build up alliances in order to advance their strategic aims and interests.

The United States policy shift towards the South Asian region has been significantly influenced by the 9/11 attacks of 2001. Henceforth, the US played a crucial role in countering the threat of terrorism in the region of South Asia. The involvement of the United States had already been apparent in the region but to a lesser extent through the establishment of political and diplomatic alliances. However, the War on Terror had significantly altered the dynamics of United States involvement in the region. The transformation of its alliances into military dimensions occurred with India, which the U.S. considered an essential ally. Not only that, the U.S. had been using Pakistani soil to combat terrorism. However, to counter Chinese influence, America allied with India. Thus, a key element of U.S. strategic thinking was the realignment of its alliances in favor of India (Tanzeem, 2020).

India emerged as a counterweight to China due to its strategic location and contiguous borders. It modernized its political and economic outlook and embraced globalization to gain American approval. In response, the United States established a nuclear and military alliance with India, aiming to resolve the stalled relations and upgrade the bilateral relationship to one that is cordial and cooperative (Mohan, Koh, & Sung-Joo, 2008). The geopolitical landscape of South

Asia has been significantly altered by the evolution of US-India relationship, particularly concerning its neighbors. The most notable impact has been on Pakistan, where national security has been threatened by military exercises and technology transfers between India and the U.S. The hostility between India and Pakistan has been evident since the partition of the two countries. As discussed in previous chapters, India's conventional military capabilities exceed those of Pakistan. While the nuclear capabilities of both states have created a balance of power that has deterred full-scale war, the recent nuclear pact with the U.S. has disrupted this balance, making the region more prone to escalating tensions.

After the end of British colonial rule in South Asia, two prominent states emerged on the world map. Due to the Cold War, both states had to join a bloc to protect their national interests. Pakistan joined the Western bloc because its leaders at the time were influenced by Western democratic principles. In contrast, India chose not to align with either the U.S. or the Soviet bloc. Nevertheless, the Kashmir conflict prompted India to seek support from the Soviet Union, which was on bitter terms with Pakistan due to its alignment with the U.S. (Yaseen, et. al., 2016). The relationship between the U.S. and India began to normalize in the context of China's rise as a regional superpower. The war between India and China led India to adopt a more accommodating stance towards the U.S., with America's assurances of support in the event of Chinese antagonism.

Additionally, the 1962 war marked a period of significant U.S. military support for India. However, relations were strained by U.S. interests in Pakistan through the 1970s and by India's nuclear test in 1974. India faced numerous sanctions from the United States until the two countries began cooperating in technological trade in the defense and military sectors in the 1980s. However, India's nuclear tests in 1998 once again strained relations, leading to harsh penalties imposed by the U.S. on the Indian government. Thus, the history of U.S.-India relations has been marked by periods of on-and-off engagement. The 21st century saw a significant shift in U.S. policy towards South

Asia, leading to enhanced strategic, defense, and military relationships aimed at promoting the War on Terror (Nagpal, 2014).

Both India and the United States share similar interests in several areas, including maintaining peace in South Asia, countering terrorism, promoting economic stability through advanced market functions, and countering the influence of other powers in the region by supporting democratic principles (Saeed, et. al., 2023; Khan, 2014). Additionally, one of the most significant factors bonding the U.S. and India is their shared interest in maritime security in the Indian Ocean. Furthermore, the US sees evolution of the Republic of India as a regional superpower as a way to counter the influence of other multipolar world powers. This has laid the foundation between US and India for cooperation.

US-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation: Myths and Realities

The U.S. and India embarked on 'Civil Nuclear Cooperation' during President Bush's tenure in 2005. Throughout the trajectory of India's nuclear development, it faced international sanctions along with restrictions after its nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998 (Jr., 2018). India was excluded from global nuclear trade and transfer of technologies owing to its non-adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The U.S. and India strategic framework, leading to the civil nuclear deal, seeking to integrate India into the global nuclear mainstream. Under the deal with the U.S., India committed to segregating its civilian and military nuclear infrastructure and accepted international oversight of its civilian nuclear facilities through International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitoring and safeguards. In this context, the U.S. agreed to enhance its civil nuclear partnership with India, including the supply of nuclear fuel and technologies. IAEA was established in 1957 to promote and encourage the peaceful use of atomic energy globally while preventing its use for military purposes. Its core features and functions include encouraging research, development, and practical applications of atomic energy, with a strong emphasis on safety, information exchange, and training (Nawab, et. al., 2021; Ferguson, 2006).

Three years of thorough negotiations linking Indian and American government leaders produced this historical political accord. The talks between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and U.S. President George W. Bush started on July 18, 2005, to establish a preliminary agreement about a civil atomic energy partnership. This initial agreement aimed at fostering the advancement of nuclear energy and ensuring energy security for India internationally. During President Bush's 2006 visit to India, a preliminary nuclear agreement was signed in New Delhi on March 2, 2006, marking the beginning of the next major stage in the civil nuclear accord. This agreement laid the foundation for further negotiations and legal adjustments necessary for its implementation.

To transform the plans into reality, in December 2006, the Hyde Act was enacted by the US Congress. With the approval of this legislation, significant non-proliferation-related legal barriers were lifted, enabling US nuclear technology transfer to India. On July 27, 2007, both nations finalized the provisions of their agreement with the adoption of the Hyde Act. The final deal includes modifications to Section 123 of the U.S. Atomic Energy Act of 1954, that's why it is sometimes referred to as the "123 Agreement." The requirements for civilian nuclear cooperation with foreign nations are outlined in Section 123, along with the modifications that made it possible for the United States to work with India in this capacity.

In 2018, the policymakers reflected on the 13th anniversary of the historic joint Statement issued by President Bush and Prime Minister Singh on July 18, 2005. This deal initiated full civil nuclear energy cooperation, leading to significant progress in domestic and international laws to accommodate India as a *de facto* nuclear power. Trust-building efforts included U.S. acknowledgment of India's regional security concerns post-1998 nuclear tests, and critical leadership from Bush, Singh, Condoleezza Rice, and Shyam Saran. Despite setbacks in nuclear cooperation due to India's Nuclear Liability Act, the Fukushima disaster, and Westinghouse's bankruptcy, the deal laid the groundwork for a strategic partnership. Today, policymakers should remember the importance of long-term vision and leadership in maintaining this relationship, recognizing that trust is hard-earned but easily lost (Agency, 2005).

In January 2015, President Obama came to India to attend the Republic Day parade, the U.S. president's participation in the Republic parade was his maiden appearance. It was a gesture of the U.S. to welcome warm relations with India. During his three-day visit, President Obama broke a deal with PM Modi that allowed companies in the U.S. to supply India with a civil nuclear agreement (News, 2015). S. Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, remarked in 2022 that there was a *PI* requirement and an aspiration to become a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, to get over political hurdles. To this day, however, despite the continuous efforts of Prime Minister Modi's political influence, India has not been yet admitted to the elite group-which impacts its ability to gain benefits available to NSG members. The two primary reasons for the greater importance of NSG membership by the BJP, headed by Modi, are that it would be a success of foreign policy and that this would equate to the political influence that the INC was using regarding the US India nuclear pact. The 123 Agreement besides a 2008 NSG waiver made India integral to international nuclear trading. However, the NSG bid of India is mainly opposed by China, which backs the parallel bid of Pakistan, and many other countries that champion nuclear disarmament. The NSG membership is likely to assist climatic goals of India by opening supplies of nuclear fuel, but geo-political hassles remain. It remains an open question whether India can, with its G-20 presidency and cooperation with Brazil which is going to assume leadership in both G-20 and NSG, manage to push the agenda for its NSG membership (Suri, 2023).

The future of the civil nuclear deal remains uncertain because of the India Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA), which creates substantial barriers to business between India and the United States. The Indian government enacted this legislation in 2010 as the legal mechanism responsible for compensating victims of atomic energy incidents. As part of its legislation, this act makes plant operators responsible for incidents yet lets operators sue their suppliers in a manner that differs from global standards. The Bhopal disaster memories from 1984 led to strict liability standards that prevent foreign nuclear suppliers from participating in the Indian market, no matter how much the government works to minimize supplier risks. Furthermore, countries like Russia continue to supply reactors to India, while U.S. companies remain cautious. The Biden administration, recalling Biden's previous support for the agreement, is pushing to finalize U.S. nuclear reactor sales to India. However, resolving the liability concerns is crucial. Potential solutions include amending the CLNDA, memorializing liability limits in contracts, or intergovernmental agreements to reassure suppliers. India's ability to address these issues is constrained by domestic politics and upcoming elections (Tellis, 2023).

Meanwhile, the nuclear arsenal of India is recognized as a crucial element in balancing the regional power dynamics with China, yet U.S. export controls limit India's access to technologies that could enhance its nuclear deterrent. Aligning nonproliferation

rules with the United States aim to promote India's growth as a strategic counterweight to China's influence is essential for deeper bilateral cooperation. This 'civil nuclear deal 2008' with the US faced significant backlash from various political perspectives, notably the Left Parties. In India, the UPA government headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, faced a withdrawal of support from the Left Parties owing to the contentious nuclear deal. The Indian government received criticism, with allegations on PM Singh that he was chosen for his position because he was not electorally competitive. This created a political storm, with the government teetering on the edge of collapse. The increasing demands to abolish the nuclear deal failed to influence PM Singh's stance (Siddiqi, 2015).

The agreement had profound implications for India's Geopolitical standing and defense capabilities. The deal implicitly recognized India as a responsible nuclear power outside the NPT framework reducing the pressure on India to accede to the NPT or CTBT. The ability to build a strategic nuclear fuel reserve enhanced India's energy security and reduced vulnerability to external pressures. The segregation of civilian and military facilities enabled India to allocate its domestic uranium resources exclusively for military purposes. With civilian reactors under safeguards, India could potentially expand its military nuclear program without international scrutiny. The deal indirectly strengthened India's nuclear deterrence by ensuring a steady supply of fuel for the civilian program, freeing up resources for the military side. The deal was perceived as bolstering India's strategic relationship with the US., providing a counterweight to China's growing influence.

India's exceptional position after the deal boosted its diplomatic clout in South Asia and globally, enhancing its bid for a permanent UN Security Council seat and membership in exclusive export control groups like the NSG. The nuclear deal significantly impacted India's diplomatic standing and soft power projection. The deal allowed India to demonstrate its commitment to responsible nuclear behavior and non-proliferation. Access to nuclear energy supported India's narrative as a leader in combating climate change. The deal underscored India's technological capabilities, enhancing its soft power in developing countries (Yaseen, et. al., 2022). The agreement created a milestone in India-U.S. diplomatic relations, expanding bilateral coordination between numerous sectors. The government of India required intricate diplomatic measures to preserve its freedom of foreign policy choices when expanding relations with the United States. India achieved leadership status among developing nations through its successful, unique deal-making with major global powers, allowing it to win favourable terms.

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The future of the civil nuclear deal remains uncertain because of the India Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act (CLNDA), which creates substantial barriers to business between India and the United States. The Indian government enacted this legislation in 2010 as the legal mechanism responsible for compensating victims of atomic energy incidents. As part of its legislation, this act makes plant operators responsible for incidents yet lets operators sue their suppliers in a manner that differs from global standards. The Bhopal disaster memories from 1984 led to strict liability standards that prevent foreign nuclear suppliers from participating in the Indian market, no matter how much the government works to minimize supplier risks. Furthermore, countries like Russia continue to supply reactors to India, while U.S. companies remain cautious. The Biden administration, recalling Biden's previous support for the agreement, is pushing to finalize U.S. nuclear reactor sales to India. However, resolving the liability concerns is crucial. Potential solutions include amending the CLNDA, memorializing liability limits in contracts, or intergovernmental agreements to reassure suppliers. India's ability to address these issues is constrained by domestic politics and upcoming elections (Tellis, Report, 2023).

Meanwhile, the nuclear arsenal of India is recognized as a crucial element in balancing the regional power dynamics with China, yet U.S. export controls limit India's access to technologies that could enhance its nuclear deterrent. Aligning nonproliferation rules with the United States aim to promote India's growth as a strategic counterweight to China's influence is essential for deeper bilateral cooperation. This 'civil nuclear deal 2008' with the US faced significant backlash from various political perspectives, notably the Left Parties. In India, the UPA government headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, faced a withdrawal of support from the Left Parties owing to the contentious nuclear deal. The Indian government received criticism, with allegations on PM Singh that he was chosen for his position because he was not electorally competitive. This created a political storm, with the government teetering on the edge of collapse. The increasing demands to abolish the nuclear deal failed to influence PM Singh's stance (Siddiqi, 2015).

The agreement had profound implications for India's Geopolitical standing and defense capabilities. The deal implicitly recognized India as a responsible nuclear power outside the NPT framework reducing the pressure on India to accede to the NPT or CTBT. The ability to build a strategic nuclear fuel reserve enhanced India's energy security and reduced vulnerability to external pressures. The segregation of civilian and military facilities enabled India to allocate its domestic uranium resources exclusively for military purposes. With civilian reactors under safeguards, India could potentially expand its military nuclear program without international scrutiny. The deal indirectly strengthened India's nuclear deterrence by ensuring a steady supply of fuel for the civilian program, freeing up resources for the military side. The deal was perceived as bolstering India's strategic relationship with the US., providing a counterweight to China's growing influence.

India's exceptional position after the deal boosted its diplomatic clout in South Asia and globally, enhancing its bid for a permanent UN Security Council seat and membership in exclusive export control groups like the NSG. The nuclear deal

significantly impacted India's diplomatic standing and soft power projection. The deal allowed India to demonstrate its commitment to responsible nuclear behavior and non-proliferation. Access to nuclear energy supported India's narrative as a leader in combating climate change. The deal underscored India's technological capabilities, enhancing its soft power in developing countries. The agreement created a milestone in India-U.S. diplomatic relations, expanding bilateral coordination between numerous sectors. The government of India required intricate diplomatic measures to preserve its freedom of foreign policy choices when expanding relations with the United States. India achieved leadership status among developing nations through its successful, unique deal-making with major global powers, allowing it to win favourable terms.

Discussion

India had to face multiple difficult challenges following the Indo-US Civil nuclear agreement because the deal required resolution in diplomatic matters, strategic aspects, technical requirements, and domestic political issues. India faced the main challenge of maintaining the independence of its foreign policy before working with a leading global power on this substantial accord. The challenge for India was to sustain its historical non-aligned approach with strengthened US strategic relations without giving up any elements of Nuclear independence, including its "No First Use" avoidance stance and minimum effective deterrent measures. India needed to understand that it would not undertake new atomic tests even if no explicit commitments regarding nuclear testing were included in the agreement.

The India-U.S. civil nuclear pact was unexpected to many and was a surprise for the international market. Many countries view the agreement as a pragmatic step towards integrating India into the global non-proliferation regime, while others express concerns about the potential erosion of non-proliferation norms. Some of the international players like Russia and France have welcomed the deal, seeing opportunities for nuclear trade with India. Conversely, China has expressed reservations, emphasizing the need for equitable treatment of all countries in the global nuclear order. The Civil Nuclear Pact between India and the United States represents a pivotal moment in international diplomacy and energy policy. While it provides significant benefits to India in terms of energy security, economic growth, and the joint strategic initiative with the United States, it also poses challenges and concerns for Pakistan, potentially impacting regional stability in South Asia (Bano, 2015). The agreement demonstrates how to maintain successful nuclear collaboration while balancing the goals of non-proliferation with the region's security concerns.

In the domain of Civil Nuclear Deal, additional advancement was made possible by Washington's acknowledgement of India as a growing global force. A number of initiatives, including the Civil Nuclear Cooperation agreement, were announced by President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in July 2005 with the intention of resolving India's concerns, bolstering its energy and economic security, and fortifying the international non-proliferation regime (India, 2024). It took overcoming long-standing mistrust and technological obstacles like dual-use technology problems to conduct this relationship analysis.

The 123 Agreement, often referred to as the India-U.S. Civil Nuclear Deal, contained a number of significant components that altered South Asia's nuclear landscape and efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. Here's a closer look at its principal components: India promised to distinguish between its nuclear activities and

facilities used for military and civilian purposes. The goal was for this split to happen gradually and be finished by 2014. India consented to place 14 of its 22 nuclear reactors under continuous IAEA surveillance. India committed to enforcing safeguards from the International Atomic Energy Agency over all current and future civilian nuclear facilities. An exclusive safeguards agreement was established with the IAEA for India, allowing inspections to verify that civilian nuclear facilities were not utilized for military objectives (Jangir, 2012).

The India-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement had far-reaching economic consequences for India, especially in the energy industry. The deal allowed India to expand its nuclear energy capacity, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and enhancing energy security. Estimates suggested that nuclear power could contribute up to 25% of India's electricity by 2050, up from about 3% pre-deal. Access to international fuel markets was expected to lower the cost of nuclear power generation in India.

The deal paved the way for foreign investment in India's nuclear sector, estimated to be worth \$150 billion over the next decade. Access to advanced nuclear technologies promised to improve efficiency and safety in India's nuclear plants. The influx of high-tech knowledge was expected to benefit other sectors of the Indian economy. Economic Growth and Industrial Development The expansion of the nuclear sector was projected to create thousands of high-skilled jobs. The deal was expected to boost India's domestic nuclear industry, potentially making it a global player in nuclear technology. Increased nuclear capacity aligned with India's commitments to reduce carbon emissions, potentially avoiding economic penalties related to climate change agreements.

Indo-Pacific Strategy of USA and Emergence of China:

When left-wing parties expressed wariness about the UPA government's tight relationship with America, China used this opportunity to push ahead with national interests. This research paper reveals how Left party leaders regularly visited Beijing to handle these issues. According to Gokhale, the Chinese party leaders and Left-wing leadership members maintained strong nationalist stances when discussing critical national matters such as border disputes. The central point of this arrangement enabled India to obtain civilian nuclear equipment from international markets, which similarly gained access to fuel resources (Bidwai, 2007). Before the agreement, India lacked international nuclear trade capabilities because it arrived at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). India received significant advantages from this agreement, which enabled it to acquire nuclear reactors, fuel components, and technology for its civilian nuclear power system development. An extraordinary waiver from NSG member nations in 2008 enabled India to start a civilian nuclear business with global markets. The approval of this waiver established the essential base for carrying out the agreement. The NSG waiver granted World recognition for this agreement while demonstrating that foreign entities would give exceptions to Indian nuclear trade practices (Standard, 2008).

Indo-Pacific Strategy of USA and Pakistan's Vulnerability

On the other hand, this deal has wide-ranging implications for neighboring country, Pakistan, taking the India-U.S. nuclear accord as a strategic imbalance in South Asia. India's enhanced nuclear capabilities could potentially shift the regional power dynamics, increasing the security dilemma for Pakistan. The most vulnerable state because of this agreement is Pakistan because of its strategic depth. The pact may lead to an escalation of arms buildup in the South Asian region. Pakistan might feel compelled

to upgrade its own nuclear arsenal and capabilities to maintain strategic balance with India. Pakistan felt excluded after this agreement as the U.S. reoriented its approach towards India and showed indifference to Pakistan's efforts to seek a similar nuclear agreement with the U.S. leading to diplomatic friction and a sense of marginalization in regional geopolitics (Jamal, 2015). The agreement highlighted the need for Pakistan to search for alternative energy sources and strengthen its own civil nuclear program to address energy security and economic development challenges (Tellis, News Article, 2023).

Both states America and India stressed the reciprocal nature of their deal. Indian PM Manmohan Singh elaborated in his remarks to Parliament that India's commitments would depend on how the United States puts efforts in fulfilling its part of the agreement. He emphasized that our obligations would only be met if the United States reciprocated and upheld its end of the agreement, making our commitments conditional upon their actions. In the same way, Burns, representing the U.S., said that "American industry would be free to pursue nuclear trade with India once New Delhi had taken its required steps." (Rohan Mukherjee, 2018)

Furthermore, no definitive arrangements had been made for executing these mutual obligations. Prime Minister Singh emphasized that the United States should take the initial step, stating, "Before voluntarily placing our civilian facilities under IAEA [supervision], we will ensure that all limitations on India have been eliminated." Burns announced that the US administration was preparing to unveil a comprehensive program to Congress in the near future; according to congressional sources, the plan did not materialize. Moving forward, President Bush and Prime Minister Singh concurred to constitute a collaborative working group to identify the steps necessary to fulfill the obligations outlined in the agreements. The two leaders aimed to evaluate the advancements achieved by this working group when President Bush visited India early the following year (State, 2008).

General Singh, India's Army Chief, warned Pakistan of potential surgical strikes, akin to the US Abbottabad raid, asserting India's military capability to conduct such operations. Pakistan's Army responded forcefully to India's threats, warning that any surgical strikes would be met with a strong response. In a core commanders' meeting, Pakistan's military leadership made it clear that they would not hesitate to retaliate decisively to any such misadventure. Pakistan's Foreign Secretary warned that any further incursions into Pakistani territory would be met with severe consequences and potentially catastrophic results, emphasizing Pakistan's defensive capabilities. In February 2019, India's attempts to exert dominance over Pakistan led to a reckless misstep, sparking a full-blown crisis after the Pulwama attacks took place.

The United States' failure to condemn the offense of Indian government against Pakistan has been interpreted in Pakistan as a sign of tacit US support, leading to a widespread conviction that India has been acting with US backing. As the strategic alliance between India and the United States of America strengthens, the position of Pakistan in US foreign policy considerations has correspondingly diminished. The US has relegated Pakistan to a tactical partner, whereas India has become a strategic partner, signifying a notable difference in the relationships. Although the US has historically maintained a policy of neutrality in India-Pakistan conflicts, the Kargil crisis marked a significant shift, as the US openly supported India's position against Pakistan for the first time. The strategic alliance of United States of America and India limits the power of Washington to mediate India-Pakistan conflicts (Jaspal, 2007). India's 'Cold Start' doctrine, presumed to be an aggressive measure taken to do harm to Pakistan, assumes

the United States diplomatic intervention will contain hostilities, but India will leverage its advantageous position on power balance to dictate negotiations (Perkovich, 2010).

The US, in its India-friendly stance, tried to dictate Pakistan's security policy, urging it to shift focus from India to internal threats. Obama labeled Pakistan's India obsession a mistake, stressing that homegrown threats pose a greater danger (Indian Express, 2011). The US support for India's permanent UNSC membership poses a significant threat to the national security of Pakistan. With veto power, India could exploit Pakistan's interests in unresolved conflicts, including Kashmir. This could force Pakistan to seek new strategic alliances to secure its interests, potentially destabilizing international peace. Adil Sultan Muhammad argues that the emerging Indo-US partnership could lead to a regional alliance shake-up, with India aligning with the US and Pakistan seeking new security arrangements independent of US influence, as stakeholders re-evaluate their interests. Pakistan's quest for alternative strategic partnerships risks creating a regional Cold War-like situation, where containment and rival alliances emerge, but with new actors and complexities unlike the past. Pakistan and China ramped up cooperation in 2011, including the swift delivery of 50 JF-17 jets and a proposed joint venture for the Gwadar port, aimed at countering India's emerging naval dominance in the Indian Ocean and reflecting shifting regional dynamics.

In addition to this, Pakistan views the US offer to involve India in Afghanistan as a security threat, as it would allow India to gain a foothold on Pakistan's western border, potentially undermining Pakistan's interests. (Bibi & Muzaffar, 2023). The US-India collaboration in Afghanistan and Africa has been a strategic move to counter Pakistan and China, showcasing the US's long standing skepticism towards Pakistan. India has sought to establish a friendly Afghanistan that offsets Pakistan's influence, aligning with its regional interests (Kapur, 2010). The USA's decision to engage India in Afghanistan signals a strategy to leverage India against Pakistan, should Pakistan not conform to US expectations (Muzaffar, et. al., 2019; Muzaffar, et. al., 2021). This could result in Pakistan facing Indian pressure on both its eastern and western flanks, raising concerns about its strategic encirclement. Retired General Durrani suggested that India could be utilized by the United States of America in order to influence Pakistan to gain its objectives, but only if India cooperates, which is unlikely. Summit Ganguly agreed, doubting this scenario would occur. Meanwhile, former Pakistani Foreign Secretary Riaz Khokhar cited Indo-US relations as a factor contributing to Pakistan-US tensions. General Durrani acknowledged that India's influence can lead other countries to restrict defense trade with Pakistan, citing examples of the Soviet Union/Russia and the US withholding certain weapon systems due to Indian concerns (Durrani, 2011). According to Marwah, European nations will make independent decisions on defense sales to Pakistan, driven by their own economic interests, and will not automatically follow the US or heed Indian concerns (Marwah, 2011). India's strategic relationships can be used to sway international opinion against Pakistan, risking its isolation on vital national interests. The increasing closeness between the US, its allies, and India may exacerbate Pakistan's diplomatic challenges.

Conclusion

The U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Deal represents a pivotal shift in South Asian geopolitics and global nuclear diplomacy. By legitimizing India's access to civilian nuclear technology despite its non-NPT status, the agreement not only strengthened bilateral ties but also marked India's emergence as a strategic partner in U.S. Indo-Pacific policy. However, the deal simultaneously deepened regional asymmetries, heightening

Pakistan's security concerns and prompting it to seek closer alignment with China. The arrangement, while celebrated as a success in diplomacy and energy cooperation, has challenged the integrity of the global non-proliferation regime and introduced new complexities in regional deterrence dynamics. As India continues to assert itself as a rising power, and the U.S. reorients its alliances in the Indo-Pacific, the need for a balanced and inclusive security framework in South Asia becomes more critical than ever. Ensuring regional stability will depend not only on bilateral deals but on multilateral trust-building, strategic transparency, and equitable access to nuclear technology.

Recommendations

In view of the research conclusions, regional stakeholders, especially India, Pakistan, China and the United States, should try to address the problems caused by the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Deal by engaging in dialogue. Strategic openness and clearer information about nuclear policies, along with cooperative arms control exchanges and solid non-proliferation commitments, will work best to avoid an intensification of the security dilemma in South Asia. While building greater ties with India, the U.S. should be keen to interact constructively with Pakistan to stop becoming strategically isolated and to promote balanced integration in the region. Also, organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) should make efforts to better fit new Powers into their systems without sacrificing international guidelines against spreading nuclear weapons. Enhanced cooperation among nations, more open civil nuclear cooperation and greater regional efforts in energy can all support longer-term peace and order in South Asia.

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